DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 019 CG 025 351

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TITLE Practicum and Internship Practices of CACREP Approved Counselor Education Programs.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counseling Psychology; *Counselor Educators; Counselors; *Counselor Training; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Practicums; Practicum Supervision; Professional Education; Student Experience
IDENTIFIERS *Council for Accred of Counsel and Relat Educ Prog

ABSTRACT

In spite of the importance of practicums and internships in counselor preparation, counselor educators have available to them little empirical knowledge on the organization and administration of these domains. So as to determine existing practices and to establish baseline information, this article reports on the practicum and internship practices of counselor education programs approved by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP). Eight categories were profiled: (1) demographic information on the counselor education department; (2) role of the practicum/internship coordinator; (3) role of counselor education faculty in practicum/internship; (4) evaluation of supervised experiences/supervision; (5) relationships with sites, site selection, and placement; (6) supervision practices and requirements; (7) on-site issues/problems; and (8) attitudes toward practicum and internship coordination. Thirty-six counselor education programs responded to the questionnaire. More than 60% of practicum/internship coordinators--the targeted group--felt that their work was valued and that their roles were understood. The results show many divergent roles attending practicum and internship coordination, which reflects the lack of guidance in the literature for standardized practices in this area. (RJM)

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ED 370 019

PRACTICUM AND INTERNSHIP PRACTICES OF CACREP APPROVED COUNSELOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract

A survey of CACREP approved counselor education programs provided eight categories of information concerning practicum and internship practices.

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Practicum and internship, supervised experiences designed to enhance the professional skills of students in counselor education programs, are an important part of counselor training. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and related programs (CACREP) requires practicum and internship experiences for students in CACREP accredited programs (CACREP, 1988). The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) requires the minimum of a counseling practicum (NBCC, 1991). In spite of the importance of practicum and internship in counselor preparation, little empirical knowledge is available to counselor educators concerning practices relating to the organization and administration of practicum and internship.

Recently, mention of practicum and internship has begun to appear in the professional literature. Boylan, Malley, and Scott (1988), Pitts (1992a, 1992b), and Pitts, Miller, Poidevant, and Meyers-Arvin (1990) have discussed various aspects of the organization and administration of practicum and internship in counselor education programs. This article reports exploratory research concerning practicum and internship practices of CACREP approved counselor education programs in eight categories.

Methodology

Instrumentation

Using the available literature and the experiences of the authors as a base, several categories of questions were identified which would provide essential information relative to practicum and internship coordination. These categories were reviewed by experts in assessment, counselor education, and supervision. Using the expert feedback to make revisions, the following eight categories of

information were used to develop the survey: demographic information on the counselor education department; role of the practicum/internship coordinator; role of counselor education faculty in practicum/internship; evaluation of supervised experiences/supervision; relationships with sites, site selection, and placement; supervision practices and requirements; on-site issues/problems; and attitudes toward practicum and internship coordination. Variable formats used for the questions in each category allowed for the collection of objective data as well as comments concerning practicum/internship experiences and problems.

Procedures

The questionnaire and a cover letter were sent to counselor education departments identified as having one or more accredited programs according to Hollis and Wantz's Counselor Preparation 1990-92 (1990). This included 56 counselor education departments. Department chairs were asked to forward the questionnaire to the person in their department responsible for practicum/internship coordination. Data were analyzed using standard statistical packages for descriptive statistics. Content analyses of open ended questions also were completed, although responses to these questions were not numerous.

Results

The results of the survey are reported here for each of the eight categories of the questionnaire.

Demographic Information

Thirty-six counselor education programs responded to the survey, a response rate of 64%. The responding departments included representation from each region of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES): Southern

(N=12, 33%), North Atlantic (N=9, 25%), Midwest (N=9, 25%), Rocky Mountain (N=1, 3%), and Western (N=5, 14%).

Role of Practicum/Internship Coordinator

The length of time a faculty member served as practicum/internship coordinator varied from less than one year for three coordinators to "forever," according to one respondent. Thirty-five percent of respondents had been coordinator for three years or less, 39% for four to six years, and 36% reported anywhere from nine to 22 years in this capacity.

Only 20% reported having a graduate assistant assigned to help with coordination activities, while 80% reported having no assigned assistant. Where available, most graduate assistants were assigned either one-quarter time or less (43%) or half time (43%). One respondent indicated having a full-time assistant.

The percent of total faculty load represented by practicum/internship coordination is shown in Table 1. The modal time commitment was between 11 and 25%, with two-thirds of respondents devoting one-quarter time or less to their coordination tasks. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated they are responsible for maintaining records of students' performance in field placements for the whole department.

One-third of respondents reported that they provide more supervision than other faculty for both individual and group supervision assignments and two (6%) provide more individual but not more group supervision.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Two respondents commented that practicum/internship coordination was in addition to their full faculty load. Another commented that he or she received a stipend for practicum/internship coordination duties. One person commented that practicum/internship coordination was equivalent to teaching one course in the department.

Role of Faculty in Practicum/Internship Coordination

Practicum/internship supervision is accomplished through a separate course assigned to specific faculty in 92% of responding departments (N=33), while only 8% (N=3) assign students to all faculty as part of their regular load. The faculty load for supervision is equivalent for all departmental faculty in 50% of responding programs, and most faculty (81%) view supervision as a legitimate part of their load. Faculty supervisors are assigned by the practicum/internship coordinator only one-third of the time. Students may self-select faculty supervisors (8% of respondents), faculty may select students (1%), the department head may assign supervisors (8%), or assignment may be negotiated by all involved (47%).

Faculty conduct individual supervision in their areas of expertise only in slightly over half of the responding departments (53%), and group supervision only in their areas of expertise in less than half (44%).

The average number of supervisees per faculty member is shown in Table 2. Half of all supervisors (53%) have an average load of one to five supervisees per academic term, and six to 10 supervisees per year. Only two practicum/internship coordinators reported having more than 14 supervisees per term and more than 20 supervisees per year.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Evaluation of Supervised Experiences/Supervision

Supervision experiences are evaluated by students in 94% of responding programs. Additional evaluations are made by department chairs (36%) and other faculty (15%). Student performance is evaluated by the individual supervisor (92%), group supervisor (47%), and host supervisor (81%). When disagreements exist concerning the evaluation of student performance, the practicum/internship coordinator is responsible for resolution in eight programs (23%) and the department chair in two programs (6%). Conferences among the student, faculty, practicum/internship coordinator, and site supervisors are the most common means of resolution.

One respondent in whose department group supervisors were not involved in the evaluation of student performance in practicum/internship commented that he or she believed that the department's policy should be changed to include group supervisors' input.

Relationships with Sites, Site Selection, Placement

Sites are selected and approved by the practicum/internship coordinator in more than two-thirds of the responding programs (69.4%). Department chairs approve sites in 20% of the programs. Specialty area faculty are involved in site approval in only 25% of programs. Students self-select sites with the approval of the coordinator in more than half of the programs (56%) while the coordinator assigns sites in 11%.

Most programs (86%) have a systematic way of soliciting site hosts' input to the department, and over half (56%) have a way to reward their site hosts. Typical

means of reward include tuition waivers, workshops, recognition ceremonies, and letters of appreciation. Half of the departments (50%) provide supervision training for site hosts, and almost three-fourths (72%) provide feedback to site hosts concerning student evaluations of the supervision they received on-site.

Most respondents (97%) report having a general agreement with their sites defining the various parties' roles and expectations concerning practicum/ internship. The agreement is usually formal and in writing, using a standard department form for all sites. Students are able to make audiotapes at their sites in 26 programs (72%) and videotapes are possible in 21 (58%). Nineteen programs (56%) include the necessity of audio taping in their site agreements and ten (29%) include videotaping in the agreement.

Students are certified as "ready" for practicum in a variety of ways. Completion of certain courses is a prerequisite in almost all programs (97%). Endorsement of all departmental faculty and endorsement specifically by the advisor are each required in eight programs (22%, respectively).

Eighty percent of programs require students to apply for practicum and internship according to specific schedules and deadlines. If students do not meet the deadlines, no action is taken and the student is still allowed to participate in their field experience in 25% of the programs. Thirty-one percent require the student to wait until the next academic term. Eight percent allow the student to appeal the decision and have a hearing of some type. In another eight percent of programs, students are allowed to participate in the field experience if they find an acceptable faculty supervisor who agrees to provide individual and group supervision. The remaining programs (28%) have other procedures for students to follow, such as a waiting list.

Supervision Practices and Requirements

Students are responsible for submitting paperwork related to their practicum and internships in all programs. Forty-nine percent of programs require a prospectus or contract for activities to be performed at the site. Eighty-six percent require a log of activities, 46% require transcripts of tapes, 34% require case studies, and 69% require case notes.

The number of tapes required to be submitted also varied. One-fourth of respondents (26%) required less than 10 tapes, 11% require 10-12 tapes, and 6% require 13-15 tapes. The individual supervisor or the group supervisor specifies the number of required tapes in some of the programs (20% and 3%, respectively).

On-site Issues/Problems

Fifty-four percent of the programs reported that a site had ever "fired" a practicum/internship student, the most common reason cited being "conflict between student and host." Unsatisfactory student performance is handled in various ways, the most common being a call from the site host to the university supervisor. Problems on the site related to insufficient client flow, insufficient on-site supervision, insufficient space/privacy, and conflict between student and host supervisor are handled in a variety of ways, including placing responsibility on the student to resolve conflicts.

Attitudes Toward Practicum/Internship

As it is defined in each department, the position of practicum and internship coordination was reported as "a valued position" in 19 programs (63%). Faculty in the department have a clear understanding of all that is involved in practicum/internship coordination in 24 programs (67%). Twenty-two programs (61%) reported that they would not change the way their department handles

practicum and internship if they could do so. Those who wanted changes (N=14, 39%) indicated some of the types of changes that would be helpful. Among the changes suggested were more allocation of resources for administrative and clerical aspects of the job, less obligation to make time-consuming site visits, more laboratory facilities, and rewards for on-site supervisors.

Discussion

In interpreting the data from this study, it is important to recall that the purpose was to determine existing practices and provide baseline information against which future developments in practicum internship coordination could be evaluated. Only accredited programs were surveyed. The practices of accredited programs may differ based on departmental interpretations of the meaning of the CACREP standards and methods for implementing them. Not all accredited programs responded, and it is possible that the characteristics of respondents may differ in unknown ways from those who chose not to respond. The questionnaire itself was somewhat lengthy. Some responses may reflect a "fatigue factor," in that respondents may have tired of providing thoughtful responses prior to reaching the end of the survey, answering only categorical items and failing to include comments to expand our understanding of their unique circumstances.

The responses relating to attitudes toward practicum/internship indicated that the practicum/internship coordinators felt that their work was valued and their roles were understood in about sixty-plus percent of the departments, which is the same range of those who were satisfied with the way practicum/ internship was handled in their departments. Further investigation of the factors which contribute to how practicum/internship coordination is valued and understood, as

well as how policy is made, is needed in order to understand this area more completely. The data suggest that the thirty-plus percent of the respondents who did not feel valued or understood may agree with the comment made by one coordinator, with possible understatement, that the job is "not coveted" by his or her colleagues.

This study, in an effort to develop baseline information concerning practicum and internship coordination, has not viewed practicum and internship separately. Future investigations will be required to identify the unique characteristics of each. Some counselor education departments treat practicum and internship differently, while some departments handle them in essentially the same way. The information presented in this article supports the variety of roles involved in practicum and internship coordination and reflects the lack of guidance in the literature for standardized practices in this area. The development of operational guidelines for practicum and internship in counselor education seems to be an important area for future exploration and discussion.

Table 1. Percent of Faculty Load Represented by Practicum/Internship Coordination

Percent of Faculty Load	N (Rounded)	Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 10	9	25	25
11 - 25	15	41	66
26 - 50	6	17	86
> 50	5	14	100

Table 2 Average Number of Supervisees per Faculty Load Supervisor.

	N (Rounded)	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Number of Supervisees per Academic Term:			
1-4	8	25	25
5	9	28	53
6-9	6	19	72
10	4	13	85
11-14	3	9	91
> 14	2	6	100
Number of Supervisees Per Academic Year*:			
1-5	3	11	11
6-10	11	42	53
11-15	6	22	75
16-20	5	18	93
21-25	2	7	100

* Fall through Spring

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